

AN
ADDRESS

TO THE
STUDENTS

OF DICKINSON COLLEGE,

CARLISLE.

By the Rev. CHARLES NISBET, D.D.

ON HIS RE-ELECTION

TO THE OFFICE OF

PRINCIPAL OF SAID COLLEGE.



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AN ADDRESS, &c.

MY YOUNG FRIENDS,

AFTER despairing even of life, and renouncing all hopes of being useful to this seminary, it has pleased God to restore me to my former health and office. I hope it will be unnecessary for me to say any thing to convince you of my good will to this country, and to this College in particular. If abandoning an honourable and independent station, and renouncing the society of many valuable and long tried friends; if my crossing the vast Atlantic, and exposing my life to the perils of a new climate, are not sufficient to persuade you of my good wishes, it will be needless to use any words to that purpose.

The troubles and distresses of my family, and the pains I have endured, both in body and mind, since my arrival in this country, I shall cheerfully forget, if I shall be enabled to be subservient to the conducting of your studies and forming your taste and morals, so that you may fulfil the hopes of your parents, and prove useful citizens to your country.

You are here assembled from various parts, and must have different views and expectations in life, but I hope you are all agreed in the desire of learning, and resolve to cultivate the powers of your mind, from a conviction that the knowledge you may acquire here, will enable you to fill with dignity and propriety the several stations to which you may be called; and to contribute your parts to promote the happiness, and to raise the reputation of this new and rising empire.

It is of the utmost consequence to your progress in learning, that you form just notions of its dignity, and importance to the public as well as to yourselves as individuals. It is not to spend your years in idleness and dissipation, or to acquire a superficial tincture of letters, that you have been sent hither with so much trouble and expence by your parents. They expect something more solid and useful in return for their pains and charge on
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your account.—They hope that you will aspire to excellence and distinction in your studies, and that honest emulation which a public education produces, will engage you to an useful and diligent employment of your time here. You are now in the most pleasant and the most important time of life: your powers are fresh, and easily susceptible of improvement; and the impressions that you receive at this time must be of the utmost importance in determining your future fates and characters. Your present rank as students is honourable. As candidates for science, fame, and consequence, you ought to despise every thing that is mean and dishonourable, and think your time too precious to be spent in trifles or vicious pursuits.

A superficial application to learning is so far from being useful that it is greatly prejudicial. It fills the mind with confused notions, and sometimes with unsufferable vanity: it tends to bring learning into disgrace, and leads the world to form false notions of its tendency and importance. It creates a contempt and aversion to study, and is apt to communicate its baneful influence to future generations. It places the student on a level with the forward smatterer, whose learning is extracted from magazines and reviews, and whose pertness arises only from his ignorance.

It is true that all are not endowed with equal powers for making progress in letters, and that different studies are suited to different tempers and characters: yet diligence, application, and constant desire of success, will carry every man as far as nature intended he should go; and the various branches of study in which you are exercised, will point out to every student what he is best qualified for, and develop the natural bent of his genius, so as to direct him how to employ himself in future. But without application we can make no discovery of our talents, and the indolent student must continue a child for life.

To encourage you to diligence, you ought to consider that you have our reputation, as well as your own fame and interest, in your hands; and that much of the happiness and satisfaction of your parents depends on your present behaviour, and the manner in which you employ your time and talents. After a pretty long life spent
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in the pursuit of learning, and undergoing so many dangers and troubles for promoting its increase in this country, I flatter myself that I have a name to lose; and you would do me a sensible and grievous injury, if it should be lost by your negligence. With regard to my colleagues, I need say nothing, as you know their capacity and characters by actual experience. We all have an equal interest in your progress, as the world will not believe us to be good for any thing, unless you appear to be profited by our pains and instructions. Your parents expect that you should return instructed and improved in the knowledge of men and things, that you should be qualified for useful and distinguished stations in life; and you cannot do justice to them, or to us, except by a diligent application to your studies, and a constant attention to moral duties.

You must be sensible that the greatest pains and diligence on our part will be quite abortive without your hearty consent and concurrence. To talk to the deaf, or, which is the same thing, to the thoughtless and inattentive, is labouring without pleasure and without profit, and must be extremely afflicting to every sensible and benevolent mind — You have it in your power to render all our labours unsuccessful, and to baffle all our hopes of reputation and usefulness; but we hope you will not be so ill-natured as to employ your power for so vile a purpose, especially as it must at the same time involve yourselves in ignorance, insignificance, guilt, and misery.

We would therefore beg, as the greatest favour to ourselves, as well as the best service you can do to your own character, to the interest of your parents and the public, that your consent may conspire with our wishes to promote your best interests: you must see the necessity of such concurrence, and the mischievous consequences of refusing it. Let us always find you in a readiness to be instructed, and a desire of excelling in those branches of knowledge in which you are to be exercised. The habit of attention, and a constant endeavour to understand and retain the instructions of your teachers, will make your studies easy and pleasant, as well as profitable to you; and unless you make your studies your pleasure, your situation as students will be exceedingly painful and uncom-

uncomfortable, your attendance will be a burden: you will live the life of prisoners, constantly displeased with your present situation, constantly longing for a change, with the dismal consciousness that you are losing your time, and that your sufferings are intirely without profit to yourselves or others.

With regard to your behaviour to us and to one another, we hope your parents have taught you the rudiments of good manners, and that you will not disgrace their instructions and example, by petulance, impertinence, or rudeness of any kind.—The child who behaves rudely and improperly to others, dishonours his father's house, and gives others an occasion to believe that he has been illy educated, or that his parents have set him a bad example. A haughty and a quarrelsome temper, a proneness to revenge and mischief, are most fatal to the character and happiness of youth, and afford the most unfavourable prognostic of their riper years, "Men are but children of a larger growth." Those habits that are formed, and those propensities that are discovered in youth, ordinarily prevail through the whole of life. Such students as you are here, such citizens you will prove to the republic. If you now acquire a love of order, justice, decency and obliging behaviour, you will be the delight of your parents, and the ornaments and supports of the state; but if you indulge pride and revenge; if you are prone to quarrel, despise, and fight with one another, what else can be expected from the growth of such habits, but that you should become the grief of your parents, a disgrace to your masters and friends, and the pests and firebrands of every society? Make your choice between these extremes.

We do not indeed expect from your early years, the coolness, the prudence and gravity of advanced age. Such errors as arise from the natural warmth, the innocent gaiety, and even the levity of youth, may be easily pardoned: but we hope you will consider that you are no longer children; that by your admission into this society, and being engaged in the studies and employments of men, you are considered as subjects of moral government, and susceptible of the principles of law and order. You have already in a good measure the command of yourselves, and are capable of discerning and being conscious when

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you are in the wrong. With these capacities you may avoid the follies of childhood, and contract those habits of attention and application that are proper for your age, and favourable to your progress in your studies.

Idleness and trifling are the bane of youth; both with respect to learning and morals: these habits prevent progress, excite quarrels, and encourage the grossest corruption of manners. They are the beginning of vices and of sorrows, and can not be too much checked and discouraged. Trifling is a perverted activity, which in every event leads to evil, and tends either to meanness or malice. Let me warn you especially against one vice, which is often prevalent among youth, and indicates or promotes the worst dispositions; we mean the practice of inciting or tempting one another to evil, and prompting them to deeds of malice or revenge.—To sow discord among brethren, to irritate the corruptions and evil passions of men, is the employment of the devil, and ought to be held in the utmost abhorrence by all who would be wise or happy.

Magnanimity and dignity of behaviour are virtues that ought to be in high esteem with youth, as they lay the foundations of a good character, and prevent our age from blushing for the meanness of our early years. But it is of the greatest consequence to form just notions of these virtues, and to be well informed wherein real magnanimity consists. It is not in contempt of others, or proneness to revenge, or being the plague or terror of society. On the contrary, a person of true magnanimity will always be just to the merits of others, and will reckon nothing so disgraceful as what is unjust, and injurious to the rights of others; and will be ashamed of every thing that is unworthy of human nature, or hurtful to the order of society: he will be mild and gentle to others, and will abstain from injuring them, for his own sake as well as for theirs. He will not leave it in the power of every one to tempt him to indecent and passionate behaviour, nor disgrace himself because another is injurious: but despising the ignoble passion of revenge, he will avoid the society of the wicked, and associate with those who are capable of instructing and pleasing him by their example, and incapable of tempting him to indecency by injury.

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The most effectual antidote against quarrelling and mean behaviour, is diligence and application to your studies: all the vices and miseries of youth arise uniformly from ignorance and trifling. If you are idle, your lives will be at once unprofitable and unpleasant. As an additional incitement to diligence, we would suggest to you the advantages you enjoy as students of this seminary, and the disadvantages you must labour under from its yet infant state. Both these ought to incite you to diligence, that you may improve the one, and surmount or compensate for the other. At present you have leisure and opportunity of profiting by books and instructors; but as these cannot yet be afforded you in such numbers and variety as is to be wished, on this account you ought to use more diligence to profit by the opportunities you have; and the fewer these are at present, the more honour will your diligence and success reflect upon yourselves, and on this new society.

If you ever hope to prosper in learning, you will not content yourselves with reading those parts only of classic authors that are prelected to you by your masters, and of which you are to give an account to them. By confining yourselves to these, you effectually disappoint their intentions, and render their pains useless to yourselves. By making you acquainted with a part, they intended to make you capable of reading the whole. There is no understanding the merit, nor profiting by the talents of an author, by consulting extracts or detached parts; you cannot have time to read all that is excellent in them at school; and I know from experience and observation, that a diligent boy will go through the whole of an author in a shorter time than the unequal abilities of a class will get through that part that is taught in public.

Although the rules of grammar and construction are necessary in order to understand foreign languages, you must not think you have done when you have made yourselves masters of these. It remains to attend to the sense, the history, the sentiment, and the beauties of thought and language; to enter into the scope and spirit of the writer, to discern his excellencies and to detect his weaknesses, or that of the times in which he lived. The classics are useful, not from their being written in dead languages, or because it costs a great deal of pains to read them:

them : but they are valuable as models of just thinking, examples of true taste, and monuments of the wisdom and capacity of antient nations, and have been the delight and wonder of many successive generations.

You ought always to remember that real learning does not consist in acquiring a great many confused and indigested ideas, nor in performing public exercises with such apparent propriety as to persuade others that you are learned : far less does it consist in the use of uncouth and harsh terms, which are not familiar to ordinary understandings ; but that it consists in the exercise and application of the powers of the mind, the improvement of our intuitive as well as our active faculties, in the knowledge and discerning of truth, and such an acquaintance with human nature, and its excellencies and defects, its acquisitions and history, as may fit us for the right conduct of life, and for promoting the happiness of ourselves and others.

In order to profit by reading, meditation and attention must be joined with it ; we must not pass by any thing that we do not understand, or content ourselves with a single reading of what is useful, excellent, or necessary ; and we ought to labour to retain what we have read, because it is only that which we retain that can be profitable to us in future. Inattentive and desultory reading is only a more active idleness, and a more decent mode of trifling. It is better to shut the book as soon as attention fails, than to accustom ourselves to read without it.

A foolish trusting to public exercises has been the ruin of many students. To confine ourselves to our prescribed lessons, and our studies to the public hours, argues a narrow mind, destitute of ambition, and insensible of the excellence and charms of true learning. Poor and scanty must be the attainments of the pretended student, who feigns attention in public, and is idle and negligent in private ! This is rendering public exercises entirely useless, and thwarting the intention of your instructors. All that can be done in public is to prescribe general rules to remove difficulties, to caution against errors, and suggest useful hints and directions : but the main business of learning is to be compassed only by private study and meditation ; and the student who does not apply his diligence in private, misunderstands the true nature and design

sign of public instructions. Those parents are likewise greatly mistaken who insist that their children should be kept to long confinement and attendance, so as to leave them neither time, spirits nor inclination for private study. It is impossible that any should be made scholars in this manner. Such injunctions discover a deep ignorance of human nature, as if it were possible to teach boys against their will, or force them into learning by whipping and imprisonment. These methods may readily procure a rooted aversion for learning, as it is certain they render progress in it utterly unattainable and impracticable; but they will never make boys in love with study, or ambitious to excel in knowledge. Even in the lowest classes, the student must prepare his lesson at home, if he expects to be able to please his master, or keep up with his class; but such regulations as leave no time for this, deprive the student of opportunities of profiting, and oblige the master to labour in vain.

In order to discover the genius and capacity of students, and to suggest useful hints for conducting their studies and regulating their conduct, I am convinced that private acquaintance and conversation are of great use. It will therefore be agreeable for me to receive visits from all of the students, as often as their studies and mine will permit, and to suggest to them what may be useful, as well as to resolve their doubts and difficulties, being determined to act as the private preceptor; as well as the public instructor of every student, without exception or respect of persons, who comes to this seminary in quest of useful knowledge.

As concord and order are the soul and strength of every society, and peculiarly necessary in a seminary for the study of letters, we hope that every student will reckon it his honour to study these with the greatest care; and to attain these you ought to reflect how disgraceful it is to disturb society, and to appear impatient of order and equal society: It will be our part to render all of you equal justice and encouragement, but it will depend on your conduct to render our labours pleasant and unprofitable. Beware of pride, from which contention cometh; abhor injustice and insulting manners, and avoid all indecent and provoking expressions. Remember that your character as well as your success in learning, depends on

your present behaviour; and that if you do not shew yourselves regular, well-bred and peaceable students, there can be little hope of your becoming useful or estimable citizens of the state.

As your time is your greatest treasure, and may be employed to the best account, we would earnestly recommend a prudent and thrifty improvement of it. For this purpose you ought to rise early, and beware of spending too much of it in unnecessary exercises or childish recreations. You have much to do, and unless you apply to your studies betimes, you must be great losers. Besides, sauntering and idleness are inimical to habits of application; and by neglecting to study, you may soon become incapable of it. If you would practise the lesson of Pythagoras, and examine every evening what you have been doing all day, you would discover the value of time, and the folly of idleness, by observing how little you have done, which may lead to a better improvement of time for the future.

You ought never to forget that all true learning is subordinate and conducive to morals and usefulness. It is not in order that you may be admired for your talents that you parents have bestowed on you benefits of a liberal education. They expect that you should become virtuous, orderly and useful members of society; that you should know how to esteem true excellence, to revere truth and honour, to form yourselves upon the best models, to despise every thing that is mean and vicious, to delight in promoting the happiness of others, to be lovers of peace, to form friendship with the virtuous and worthy, to avoid the society of the wicked, and to merit and command the esteem of the wiser part of your fellow citizens.

Young people are apt to imagine that they have little to do with religion, and that it is time enough to think of that in mature life; but this is a grievous mistake. "Train up a child," says Solomon, "in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." "Even a child is known by its way, whether it be pure, and whether it be right." Young as you are, you have a conscience; you are subjects of moral discipline, and susceptible of good or bad moral characters. You know not whether you may live to ma-
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ture age, and what shall become of your souls if you die in an ignorant, thoughtless, and irreligious state? We presume that your parents have taught you to know and honour the God who made you, to revere his name, and to pray to him daily, for the pardon of your sins, the purifying of your natures, and final happiness and salvation through Jesus Christ. We hope you are instructed in the necessity of holiness and virtue as the only means to fit you for eternal life. It shall be our endeavour to second the lessons and intentions, as well as to fulfil the wishes of your parents, so far as in our power, by suggesting to you, as occasion offers, suitable advices for your moral and religious conduct in life; and in so doing we are sure of pleasing them by endeavouring to promote your real happiness. Even the wicked and thoughtless parents would be sorry to see their children growing up in vicious habits; and nothing can exceed the sorrow of virtuous and Christian parents when their children walk not in the ways of God. Give joy to your parents, and to your masters and friends, by an early application to religious knowledge and practice; read the word of God with care, reverence, and attention: pray to God for wisdom and spiritual understanding, and ye shall not ask in vain. Be assured that it is your highest honour to honour God, to thank him for his benefits, and keep his commandments; you will be more worthy of the esteem of your neighbours, if you pray to God morning and evening, if you study to please him, and to keep the sabbath-day holy, to abstain from all mean and vicious conduct. You may assure yourselves that such a conduct will contribute no less to your progress in learning than your improvement in virtue. God is the father of our spirits, and ought to be acknowledged and worshipped in that character. He made our souls, with all their wonderful powers; and their improvement and exercise must depend on his bounty. The knowledge of the plowman and the mechanic is attributed in scripture to the teaching of God, and that large and comprehensive knowledge which distinguished King Solomon, is expressly said to have been the gift of God. And who else can give it? As in religion, so likewise in learning, though Paul may plant, and Apollos water, it belongs to God only to give the increase. You are grossly mistaken if you imagine
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that a religious life is melancholy or disagreeable; on the contrary, it is the only road to true pleasure and satisfaction. To have God for your friend, your father and defender, is true dignity, as well as solid peace and confidence. Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good, keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile, depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. The face of God is against them that do evil, to cut off their memory from the earth. Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.

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